Realizing the purpose of life in Corona times

By: Faten Sabri

There is no life worth living except the life of the Hereafter:

I have been always struggling to fully understand this saying of Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him. I wanted to get out of this inner contradiction. I wanted to balance between gaining happiness for myself and my loved ones in this life, yet on the other hand I know how great the happiness is in the Hereafter. The struggle continued until my father got sick.

I was living in Africa with my kids and husband (who was a delegate of the United Nations project). I was sad because I lived far away from my father who was really sick. I kept praying for his cure and happiness in this life. Eventually, he died. I was in great pain and sadness, until I saw a dream one night which made me cry happily. I saw him laying on a bed, and he told me: come closer. So, I did, then he said: we are alive here, we are not dead. Then he pointed around him saying: Look, around at those who are reading Qur'an. I exclaimed: Are you happy?

He replied: I am haaaaapy.

He said it with very long tone. I can still hear its echo in my ears till now.

I woke up happily repeating: "There is no life worth living except the life of Hereafter."

The delusion of the contemporary Man:

There is a beautiful story of an American physicist who once came to visit our center. He spent two hours in an

argument with my colleagues at the library. It was all about proving the existence of God on a scientific basis in which he was denying.
I was silently listening without interfering until my colleagues felt tired. He was extremely argumentative. They all left the library without reaching any result. After that, the visitor asked me if I could persuade him in a scientific way that God does exist, and asked if I have knowledge in science.
I smiled and said: Oh! I have a better knowledge. I know God!
He grumbled: No, no please I insist that there is no God but there is science.
I replied: You cannot just refute the existance of the author because you got to know the book. They are not alternatives. Science discovers the laws of the universe but it did not create them, God did!
I continued: Anyway, forget about science for now and tell me. You want to convince me that there is no God. So, are you happy with this? Are you satisfied with yourself?
He surprised me admitting: Never, I have never felt happy in my life. I am miserable and I don’t know what to do, then he cried.
I replied: Do whatever makes you happy. Do you know the Law of attraction, the law that means you get what you expect?
He answered surprisingly: Do you believe in this law?
I said: I know it but I don’t believe in it. I believe in a greater one which is the good thinking in God. We believe that God the Creator created us to have mercy on us, and not to torture us. We believe that He prepared for us a Paradise whose width is the Heavens and the Earth, so we will get what we expect if we obey His orders.

However, you believe that you are nothing, came from nothing, and will end up with nothing. Thus, you will get maybe worse than what you expect. Do you accept (Nothing) as an answer from your son when you ask him what do you want to be when you grow up? You will not accept this and you will try every possible and impossible way to urge him to study, work and do his best to be a better, important and valuable person in the future.
He uttered: I feel lost.
I answered: You will stay lost until you eventually return to God, just like how a lost child will never find peace and happiness until he finds his mother.
Touched by my words he said: Can anyone become a Muslim?
I said: Of course. Islam is the religion of nature.
He asked: Do I only have to believe in God?'
I replied: You also have to believe in His messengers and prophets from Prophet Adam to Prophet Muhammad, and to believe in the Hereafter.
He agreed: Yes, yes.
I continued: You also have to accept Jesus peace be upon him as a messenger, not a God or a son of God.
He said eagerly: No, Jesus is not God, he is a Prophet.
The point here is that Man should look at himself first before he becomes conceited away from the truth. Despite how technology developed around us, we still aren't able to develop ourselves to mortal creatures or even be independent creatures who don't need food, drink, air or even not going to the restroom.
Man tries hard searching the whole universe for happiness and continuance in life, although he knows for sure that he cannot travel to the moon without special suits and in special spacecrafts in fear of death.

Say, "Be you stones or iron. Or [any] creation of that which is great within your breasts." And they will say, "Who will restore us?" Say, "He who brought you forth the first time." Then they will nod their heads toward you and say, "When is that?" Say, "Perhaps it will be soon". [1]

According to Secularism, Charles Taylor describes how the western society considers Man as the centre of the universe. In other words, the laicist considers himself as the master of the universe and that all what he cannot see, does not exist.

It is not surprising that western societies, despite having all means of comfort, face difficulties in dealing with evil. So, the luxuriants mostly commit suicide when facing any problem.

Victor Frankl said: “Today people have all means of living but with no meaning of life itself, which makes life as a prison that contains people rushing between the walls of life and death. They are afraid of every bite in a meaningless life where every pain or hardship is inexplicable, inevitable and unclassifiable. It is only sort of chaos and tragedy.”

The main purpose of life isn’t to enjoy a temporary sense of happiness, but to achieve inner and deep peace through knowing and worshipping God. Achieving this aim will lead eventually to eternal bliss and true happiness. So, if this is our goal, we will go through every trouble to achieve it.

Can you imagine a person never having a hard time or pain? According to his luxury life, he will forget all about God. Thus, he will fail achieving what he was created for in the first place. Compare this to another person whose

[1] (Qur’an 17:50-51).

painful experiences led him to God and to achieve his goal.

From an Islamic point of view, the person who goes through suffering knows God better and he is closer to Him than another person who forgets God because they don’t suffer. Each human being has a goal which is usually based on his beliefs. The thing that we find in religion but not in science is the cause and the goal which Man seeks. Thus, religion explains the reason why we were created, but science is just a means.

When Man goes towards religion, the most frightening thing for him is the deprivation of life’s enjoyment. For most people, being religious means, they need to avoid everything else; everything is forbidden. This is the false judgment that pushes people away from religion. Islam corrects this misconception; it tells us that everything is permissible, and the forbidden things are few. Islam invites us to merge in society, and to balance between the spiritual, physical needs, and others’ rights. So, one of the great challenges that faces the irreligious societies is how to deal with evil and bad deeds. You will find nothing but enforcing hard punishments.

The value of the present life :

People held tests to differentiate between the students through marks and degrees before they moved into a new part of life. Despite how short the exam is, it evaluates the student’s fate; the same applies with this worldly life. It is a short test for people to rank them in degrees when they face the hereafter. Man comes out of life with his deeds only, not with anything else from his properties. Thus, people must realize that they should act in this life for the sake of rewards, and the high degrees in the hereafter. People have forgotten the true meaning of life as they continuously complained from Corona

Virus. God created us in a test. Pain and trouble are parts of the test. Passing the test will ease the way to eternal bliss in Paradise.

He Who created Death and Life, that He may try which of you is best in deed: and He is the Exalted in Might, Oft-Forgiving. [2]

Atheists misunderstand our goal of life as a test for our behavior and deeds. For example, how could we possibly develop patience if we do not face experiences that need patience? How could we develop courage if don't we face risks? How could we have mercy on each other if there wasn't anyone in need of it?
I remember I have been always repeating:)O God, grant me wisdom, which if I have been given, I will have received much good). After moving to Africa, I met a lot of difficulties. I insisted on raising my children in a religious environment on the straight path, without causing them to become introverts. This made me acquire a lot of wisdom later, I realized that God has answered my prayers.
So, why the test?
Some people say: If God is merciful, then why does He not just let us all enter Paradise?
Acually, God wants us all to be religious.

If you are ungrateful, then remember! God is independent of you, and He does not favour ingratitude on the part of His creatures. If you are grateful He will be pleased with you. For no one who carries a burden bears another's load; and your returning is to your Lord, when He will tell you what you used to do. Surely He knows what is in the hearts. [3]

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[2] (Qur'an 67:2).
[3] (Qur'an 39:7).

However, if He sends us all to Paradise, it will not be fair. He will treat Moses the same as pharoes; all evil and innocent people will enter Paradise as if nothing happened in the worldly life. We need a criteria that decides who would deserve Paradise. One of the beautiful things in the Islamic religion is that our Creator (who knows us better than ourselves) told us that we got all we need to overcome these tests. **God does not charge a soul except [with that within] its capacity…**[4]
However, if we cannot overcome these hardships after doing our best, God's mercy and justice will ensure that we receive compensation in some way, either in this life or in the eternal life that lies ahead.

Knowing God in good and bad times:

Once, I was in a meeting with an Administrative from an Argentian International foundation. My colleagues advised me not to talk to him about religion because it is a thorny issue, but I refused and said: I don’t know what to do apart from talking about religion. I was their only choice because I was the only one who speaks Spanish. I started the conversation with mentioning the greatness and Oneness of the Creator and making a simple comparison between the various religions. I highlighted that monotheism is the missing link that could unify nations. He surprised me with his red face and flushing tears saying: you Muslims are way better than us.
I replied: why?
He answered: you return to God in good moments and bad moments, but we don’t do this except in troubles only. We are attached to the present life while you are attached to the Hereafter.
I said: Hardships are bliss for you then.

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[4] (Qur’an 2:286).

He was moved.
We humans quickly forget for various reasons. One of these reasons is comfort and bliss. That is why God sometimes interrupts the sweetness of life with some tribulations when we cling to its luxury, and we forget our main goal for which we came to this world for.
I continued: This life is a test. Man comes out of it with a passing or a failing certificate. If someone says he likes his life, it's as if he is saying that he likes the exam and doesn't want to get the certificate.
Thus, loving this life is the origin of all evil, and this is how Man is locked in a maze. He can't understand the existence of these two contradictions.
The test in this life could be through goodness or evilness. Usually, when Man is tested by goodness, he gets more attached to this worldly life, and loses connection with his Creator. Unlike when he is tested by evilness, he gets more attached to God. A person is not aware that the test of evil may benefit him more than harm him in this world.
The most obvious example is what happened to Man when he developed science and technology. He forgot all about religion, God, and even other people around him. Evil is not necessarily Man-made, but it still affects him somehow. Spreading of disease, earthquakes, and volcanoes, are evil according to human beings, but they actually happen to preserve the ecological balance. In addition, God gives people the means to face these incidents. Recently, Man has been exposed to the coronavirus disease, which disrupted the movement of life in many aspects. So, Man became more eager to help others, and people became unified, even enemies stepped aside from their problem to find a solution for this danger threatening them all. As if this danger

benefits human beings especially when civil wars stopped. We heard the prayer call “God is greater” at some places we never imagined hearing it in, as if this virus uncovered their hearts’ veil.

Know that the life of this world is but amusement and diversion and adornment and boasting to one another and competition in increase of wealth and children - like the example of a rain whose [resulting] plant growth pleases the tillers; then it dries and you see it turned yellow; then it becomes [scattered] debris. And in the Hereafter is severe punishment and forgiveness from God and approval. And what is the worldly life except the enjoyment of delusion. [5]

Just as we knew that the worldly life is a place of testing and affliction. This life is full of contradictions: sickness and health, evil and goodness, heat and cold, day and night, life and death, etc.

Man has his own freewill to choose. God didn’t plant evil in the human soul, but God planted the freewill to choose between evil and goodness. Man will freely choose and God will eventually judge.

And [by] the soul and He who proportioned it (7) And inspired it [with discernment of] its wickedness and its righteousness, (8) He has succeeded who purifies it, (9) And he has failed who instills it [with corruption]. [6]

And say, "The truth is from your Lord, so whoever wills - let him believe; and whoever wills - let him disbelieve...**"** [7]

An era of anaphylaxis:

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[5] (Qur’an 57:20).
[6] (Qur’an 91:7:9).
[7] (Qur’an 18:29).

Evil and goodness are inseparable through ages. It has been noticeable that people become more sensitive towards evil nowadays. This is due to the comfortable life people live now. This made people become more sensitive towards evil. The common saying “to better and longer life” became our motto after we reached the moon. So, it became normal that people get more sensitive when they see the children’s tears, feel the elder’s weakness, and hear the screams of patients.

Human’s excellency:

God knows that Man tends to be lazy and neglect things, so sometimes he intends to wake us up. People have many good traits which appear clearly through hardships. Trouble reveals courage, generosity, brotherhood, and selflessness, even with animals. Afflictions such as orphanage, homelessness, or hunger bring out many good people to the world, as well as magnificent heroes around us whose pain and suffering arouse their virtues, and enable them to make history. Even in our personal life, after each failure, we start a new beginning. God shutting one door is just a sign to change our direction. So, in dealing with a problem we must realize that our problem was not these dark gloomy clouds chasing us, but it is truly our heavy eyelids that prevent us from seeing the sunlight. God periodically refreshes our lives through difficulties.

Therefore, as soon as people wake up from their negligence, they realize the true meaning of their existence and they feel the urge to live for greater and more important goals. So, we can say that this ‘evil’ plants human excellency.

Through difficulties, people don’t only discover their aims, but they also live with God, for God, and by God in this life and the life after death.

The happiness of this life and the Hereafter:

Once an atheist asked me about Man's need to believe in God, and that it is enough for people to have morals and values to control them and mutual respectful relations. I told him that it is meaningless to respect and love your work colleagues while you neglect your relation with your boss. To get goodness in our life we have to strengthen it with our Creator.

In addition, what could be our motivation to have morals and values? To respect laws or respect others? If you say the enforcement of laws, we will then argue that law is not available in every place and at any time. It is not enough to solve all our local and national problems. Many people commit crimes and bad deeds are away from others and from law. All these religions around us prove clearly how much people need it in their lives. We need it to arrange and discipline our behaviors on a religious basis which cannot be covered and hidden.

The necessity of religion is proved by the presence of many religions, which most nations on earth resort to in order to regulate their lives and control the behavior of their people on the basis of religion or law. As we know, the only criterion for a person is his religious belief in the absence of law, since law cannot exist with a person at all times and everywhere.

The only deterrent that can affect a person is his inner belief that he is being watched and held accountable, and this belief is buried and firm in his conscience. When the person is involved in a wrong act, he tries to conceal it because he has an instinct where he can differentiate between the right and wrong; hence, he was able to tell that this act is outrageous, and that it is denied by common sense. All this proves the existence of religion and belief in the depths of human psyche.

Religion fills the gap that laws don’t. Man-made laws cannot fill or bind minds and hearts to it at different times and places.
A person's motivation or drive to do good differs from one person to another. Each person has his own motives and interests to do, or adhere to specific ethics or values.

- Punishment: Can prevent people from harming each other.
- Reward: Can encourage people to behave good.
- Self-esteem: Can control Man’s desires as what one loves today may hate tomorrow.
- The religious restrain: Knowing and fearing God is the strong and effective motivation.

Religion has a great influence in moving people's feelings and emotions, whether in a positive or negative way. This indicates that the origin of people's instinct is based on knowledge of God, and it may be used in many cases intentionally or unintentionally to influence people. This leads us to the danger of religion in a person’s consciousness, because it is related to his Lord.
Ibn al-Qayyim said:
“In the heart there is a dishevel; it can’t be accumulated unless we direct ourselves to God, and upon Him is desolation. It will not be removed unless Man is left alone with Him in his solitude. Sadness exists within the heart; it will not go away unless we acknowledge the pleasure of knowing Him and our sincere treatment with Him. Anxiety as well exists within the heart; it won’t go away unless we meet with Him and escape from Him to Him. There is a fire of heartbreak, it will not be extinguished unless we get satisfied with the destiny, His commands, and whatever He forbade us from, and for us to embrace patience on that until the time of His meeting after death. There is a strong request: the request does not stand

without God being the only required. Neediness exists within the heart; only His love, His constant remembrance, and devotion to Him can fill this need, and even if one gets the world and everything in it, that need will never be met !!”[8]

[8] An Islamic Scholar.
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